

the folklore of disasters



Folklore is a rich repository of local wisdom passed down through the generations of community members either orally, through written records or other means such as art forms. While the entertainment function may be present, valuable lifesaving lessons may be culled from the experiences of the past as encoded in folklore. People have dealt with hazards in the environment in ways that they find meaningful as a community. People have engaged with hazards in a manner that has proven to be effective in many encounters with hazards in the past. People explain the occurrence of a hazard through folktales. One of the more prominent cautionary tales in disaster risk reduction is the legend of the seven rollers and the *laboon* of the Moken in Thailand which reportedly helped save lives from the great Indian Ocean tsunami in December 2004 (Arunotai, 2004). Similarly, the legend of the *smong* among the Simeulueans had also saved people living in coastal communities in Aceh (Syafwina, 2014). Proverbs and folk songs are also repositories of local wisdom such as the proverb used to predict the weather among agricultural communities in Vietnam. The proverb speaks of a corona around the moon which portends of drought whereas a halo may indicate rain soon (Ngoc Huy and Shaw, 2008). Observing erratic animal behavior has been reported to portend the coming of a devastating typhoon (Dalisy and Tatel, 2011) in certain areas in the Bicol region. Hence, being mindful of references to hazards in folklore may help in predicting their occurrence and may potentially stem damages from devastating hazards (Dalisy, 2014). This issue of *Banwaan* is devoted to giving readers a glimpse of how valuable folklore can be to hazard mitigation and disaster risk reduction efforts. This issue of *Banwaan* is devoted to folklore of hazards and its use as harbinger or deterrent to disasters. The articles in this issue show that local explanations and responses to hazards exist and that understanding these could potentially contribute to more contextualized disaster risk reduction programs. Equally important, the articles also show that folklore, just like any other aspect of culture is not monolithic. Change and convergence with other paradigms are possible.

The article of Reidan Pawilen on **“Raining in Quezon and Laguna: Revisiting shared intangible heritage with the 1953 historical data papers”** examines similar folklore on rain, storm and typhoons in the two provinces using 1953 historical data of the Philippines. Pawilen argues for the recognition of the value of folklore studies in writing local and cultural history of the Philippines, particularly in the context of interrogating how people understood and responded to meteorological hazards in the past.

Emmanuel Jason Bolata in his article on **“Stars of Portent: Comets and Disasters in the Philippine Past, 1680 - 1910”** delved into the narrative communicated by the paintings of Estaban Villanueva y Pichay on the Basi Revolt of 1807. Prominent in these paintings was the Great Comet of 1807. Bolata contends that celestial bodies, in the early 19th century Philippines, were interpreted to be portents of “...famine, misery...pestilence, wars, fall of kings, collapse of empires...” Thus, the paintings gave the message to the native Filipinos that rebellion at the time would most likely lead to devastating results. Similar narratives are evident in the literature. Celestial bodies as harbingers or signs of an impending disaster are part of the folklore of other areas in the Philippines like Albay and in other countries like Vietnam (Dalisy, 2014). Bolata, likewise, argues for the universality of celestial bodies as portents of disasters reflecting the collective experiences and knowledge of previous generations that serve as guides for the succeeding generations in navigating through potentially devastating hazards. In the end, Bolata poses the counter narrative of hope saying that a comet may not only herald doom but may also act as a “...comet of hope”.

Karl Poblador engages folklore in explaining the seemingly high number of maritime accidents in what is popularly known as the Romblon Triangle in his article **“The Curse of the Tablas Strait: An Interrogation of Maritime Accidents from 1902-2008”**. While the folk explanation seems to be more the more readily accepted explanation of the sinkings in the Tablas Strait which is part of the mythical Romblon Triangle, Poblador encourages a revisiting of the official narratives of the sinkings in the attempt to provide an alternative to the more dominant folk elucidations of the sinkings in the area.

JC Gaillard, in his article **“Tárak ye king dapu! Hybrid na pagkakaintindi sa ayun sa Indung Kapampangan”** challenges what he contends is the dominant western perspective of hazards as extraordinary life events that require

extraordinary solutions. Gaillard uses the Indung kapampangan in putting forth the point of view that hazards such as the ayun or the lindol (seismic events) are viewed by locals with a hybrid perspective, putting together precolonial paradigms and the colonial perspective and the current global context in shaping the kapampangan views of the ayun in relation to danger. Gaillard contends further that the hybrid perspective can be taken as resistance to the colonial and possibly also, the neo colonial paradigms in disaster studies.

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